



Over 100 marchers criticize police in deaths of black men

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By Bill Schackner, Post-Gazette Staff Writer

About 125 people marched peacefully to a rally outside the Mount Oliver municipal building yesterday to decry what they say is a pattern of excessive force used by police against black men.

In sharply worded speeches and in homemade signs, the demonstrators of varied races invoked the memories of several black men who died while in police custody or as a result of encounters with police.

Some directed their criticism at Mount Oliver officers, while other marchers expressed anger over recent deaths in Pittsburgh and Uniontown.

"A lynching is a lynching is a lynching, whether it's done behind a white hood or a blue uniform," said Tim Vining, executive director of The Thomas Merton Center, one of several who addressed the crowd.

"The police kill black people with impunity," said marcher Sanjulo Ber of the Hill District, his voice rising with emotion as he finished the thought. "We're not going to stand for it."

Mount Oliver officers closed part of Brownsville Road for the march. It began and ended at the Lighthouse Church on Arlington Avenue, several blocks from the rally.

One case raised yesterday was that of Charles Dixon, 43, of Altoona, who died Dec. 23, two days after officers restrained him at the Mount Oliver Fire Hall. The Allegheny County coroner, Dr. Cyril H. Wecht, has recommended that homicide charges be brought, though he did not specify who among the Mount Oliver and Pittsburgh officers involved was responsible.

District Attorney Stephen A. Zappala Jr. is reviewing that case. Also under review is the death of Bernard Rogers, 28, a Hill District man shot by a Housing Authority officer outside Bedford Dwellings on Nov. 15. Wecht has recommended a homicide charge in that case, too.

Groups represented yesterday ranged from the NAACP to Pax Christi Pittsburgh to the Rosenberg Institute for Peace and Justice, which secured a parade permit after the American Civil Liberties Union threatened to sue borough officials.

Renee Wilson, director of People Against Police Violence, told the crowd that instead of police reform, "We keep burying the children." She alluded to her recent arrest and, like other speakers yesterday, insisted it was a result of her criticisms of police.

Wilson, 42, of the Hill District, was charged by Allegheny County detectives Tuesday with conspiracy, bank fraud and writing bad checks. The charges were tied to \$1,561.95 in transactions involving a First National Bank account she shared with her ex-husband, Lee M. Wilson III.

The bank claimed the Wilsons knew the account contained insufficient funds to cover checks, debit card purchases and ATM withdrawals they made.

The bank also initiated charges that county police filed Aug. 19 against Wilson's ex-husband; her son, Lee IV; daughter Shayla; and her son's girlfriend, Summer Edmunds, over excess withdrawals from their accounts.

After Renee Wilson turned herself in Wednesday evening for arraignment and alleged that the charges amounted to police retaliation, Mount Oliver Solicitor James Perich noted that borough police had nothing to do with the bank's case against Renee Wilson.

Wilson said it seemed suspicious that she was charged later than other family members, after organizing the public protest rally against police.

Staff Writer Gary Rotstein contributed to this report.

Bill Schackner can be reached at bschackner@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1977.

Back

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